



Associated Press Wirephoto

WILHELM PIECK
East German president ill

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East German President Ill Of Pneumonia

BERLIN, March 17 (AP).—Soviet-zone President Wilhelm Pieck has pleural pneumonia, German sources said today. The anti-Red "Fighting Group Against Inhumanity" reported the Communist leader, 77, was a patient in an East Berlin Hospital.

East German contacts relayed the information to the West Berlin underground, but no Soviet-zone officials would discuss it.

Pneumonia killed Communist Czechoslovakia's President Klement Gottwald Saturday, five days after he attended the funeral of Prime Minister Stalin in Moscow's Red Square.

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Whether Pieck, a rugged street fighter from the early days of communism, is in critical condition could not be ascertained. Communist Peoples' Police are guarding the hospital.

The East press and radio have avoided any mention of the President since he failed to appear at Stalin memorial rites in East Berlin March 9.

Pieck and party boss Walter Ulbricht have been Stalin's most faithful acolytes in Germany and possess Soviet citizenship. Pieck holds a colonel's rank in the Soviet army.

In Paris, the evening news paper Paris-Press reported that Maurice Thorez, ailing leader of France's Communist Party had suffered a relapse and that his physical condition had become serious.

The paper said the report on the No. 1 French Red, who has been in Moscow for nearly two years, was brought back by Jacques Duclos and Andre Stil on their return yesterday from Stalin's funeral. Thorez went to Russia 20 months ago after suffering a stroke.

[Rome heard that the Moscow-trained police boss of Communist Albania also was ill, the United Press reported. Albanian refugee sources in Italy said Interior Minister Mehmet Shehu had not been seen in public for three weeks and was presumed to be ailing.]